TAPE INDEX

NARRATOR Tom Petersen, Jr.

INTERVIEWER Phyllis Lotz

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TRANSCRIPT PAGE NO.	TAPE COUNTER	SUBJECT	NAMES
1	000	Introduction	
1	008	S.Y. Valley background	
1	021	Engineering background	Stanford U.
2	026	Duties as manager of District	
2	034	Area covered by disttict	Santa Ynez Los Olivos Solvang
2	042	The wells that supply the water	
3	056	Watching the "live stream" distrubion	
4	073	Following the water down stream to Lompoc	
4	078	History of the Water District "Liver Stream Aggreement"	
5	103	Gin Chow Decision - 1928 -1932	
5	128	The difference between the two	Live Stream Gin Chow
6	135	Water above ground	
6	140	Check Points	San Lucas Br. Refugio Br. Alisal Br. Hwy. 101 Robertson Br.
6	146	Early directors of district	Wm. Cooper Wm. Schyler Rich. Henning Bill Laranjo Andy Petersen
7	173	The number of people served by district	
7	188	Law Suit against Santa Barbara	
8	218	Gibraltar Dam	
9	234	The reason for the law suit	
9	245	River water a necessity to the S.Y.Valley	
10	260	Fishing on the river	
11	295	Least Bell's Vireo (bird)	
11	315	1969 Valley Flood	
13	385	State Water	
14	460	Future of the Water District	
		End of Side 1, Tape 1 Begin Side 2, Tape 1	
15	000	Re-evaluating the Gin Chow Decision	
16	034	Is there enough water to serve all the people of the district?	
17	060	Water Conservation	
18	081	Future of Tom Petersen	
19	090	Working with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation	
		End of interview	

Interview with Thomas Petersen, Jr.
Date of Interview: July 1, 1899, Historical Museum
Interviewer: Phyllis Lotz
Transcriber: Phyllis Lotz

Begin Tape 1, Side 1

PL: Introduction.

What is your background here in the Santa Ynez Valley?

Mr. P: I was born here and have lived here all my life. My Dad's parents came here when he was ten years old. He was born in Ferndale, Calif., and the family moved their dairy onto Alamo Pintado Road and farmed there from 1914 until Dad retired in 1969, then he and my mother moved to High Meadow. In 1958 I came back from the service, two years in the Army and went to work for Dad on the ranch, then in 1960 the Santa Ynez Improvement District was looking for somebody to be the supervisor of the district and get easements for the new pipeline system that was to serve Cachuma water to the district, I applied for that job and got it and have been with the district since then.

PL: Do you have some engineering background?

Mr. P: I graduated from Stanford University in 1956 with a degree in Industrial Engineering which is not quite applicable to the water business but is close enough. It covered mostly factory kinds of things but management also, so I guess I am putting my college years to a little bit of use.

PL: Our interview today was to concentrate on the Santa Ynez River and it's riparian rights. So what are your duties

as manager of the Improvement District?

Mr. P: I have worked for the Improvement District #1 which serves water to the area from Santa Ynez on the east, Solvang on the west, and Los Olivos on the north. It comprises about 10,000 acres where we serve both domestic and irrigation water.

PL: Does that cover any ground on the south side of the river?

Mr. P: No, not at all.' Just short of the river by a couple hundred feet. We have Cachuma water, it is one of our sources where we have 3,300 acre feet of it each year, then we have river appropriations where we pump out of the alluvian areas of the river and also upland wells that are located from a couple of wells here in Santa Ynez and two near Los Olivos.

PL: You say those wells are a water source, but do they have anything to do with the river water?

Mr. P: The river wells that we have pumps in, is known as the under flow of the river. The river channel is very shallow that is filled with very loose gravel and as a result during most of the year the water does not flow on top of the surface but underneath. It does not mix with the water from the upland basins which is north of the river channel.

PL: How deep would those wells be?

Mr. P: Those in the river channel would be 50 to 60 feet deep to get into the basement rock, in the uplands area we have wells that range I think from the oldest one at 175 feet and the two in Los Olivos area are 1,340 feet deep, that go to the shale rock at that point.

PL: What are your duties for the district?

Mr. P: Just about anything and everything. It is not,... fortunately there are not any assigned duties as such. It is just a question of what ever needs to be done. I have three field guys who handle the routine things, such as reading meters, repairing pipes, making new installations, and services. On a day to day basis for example, right now we are... the Bureau of Reclamation is making a releasse down the river (of water) to recharge the underground gravels with water and one of the things I have been doing this week is to follow that water to see how far it has gone each day so that we can see when the basin is filled. We will be doing this for another week or ten days to get water to Lompoc, below the narrows at Robertson Bridge at 13th Street.

PL: When you say you are following the water, does that mean you are sighting or poking a stick down in the ground to see where the water is?

Mr. P: Generally in this case it does flow on top of the surface and we can see it from the road, but sometimes I do alot

of walking but for the last couple of day I have been able to spot the water from Santa Rosa Road, near Buellton, to see how far it has gone. I am out in the field a good share of the time.

PL: Can you give me a little of the history of the Santa Ynez River Water Conservation District?

Mr. P: The district was formed in 1939 as a result of some of the activity on the river where the south coast entities were trying to take water from the river and take it for Santa Barbara and Goleta. To protect the rights of the people within the Santa Ynez Valley, this district was formed after there were already two dams on the Santa Ynez River: Gibraltar and Juncal. Gibraltar was built in about 1920 and had a storage of about 14,500 acre feet. Juncal Dam was built in 1931 by the Montecito Water District and at the time it was new, it stored 6,700 acre feet of water. Consolidating their water rights was the aim of the people on this side of the mountains so they would not lose out on their water. And since this district was formed it has played an active role in protecting water rights and when Cachuma Dam was built in 1953, part of the project was the entering into a contract with the Bureau of Reclamation what was called the "live stream" agreement where the water rights are protected for those who live down stream from the dam and so that is why I am following the water these days. PL: Is that also called the Gin Chow

P.L.

Decision? Mr. P: No, it is not, the Gin Chow is completely different. The Gin Chow Decision was a court case brought by some 40 people, among them Gin Chow, a farmer in Lompoc. (This was in the year 1928) to prevent the city (Santa Barbara) from taking all the water. In this little booklet I have here it ways there were 40 people who brought this suit that claimed to be riparian to the Santa Ynez River and they were fighting the city and Montecito against taking water and then the Gin Chow case decision allowed the city to take 4,189 acre feet out of the river and out to the south coast. Apparently the conclusion of the court was that, the court felt there was enough water to provide for the people along the river on the north side of the mountains.

PL: Was the court saying that the water runoff to the ocean was what the city could have?

Mr. P: I think that is right, I know in the appropriation for Cachuma for example there has to be a live stream at various check points down the river and then the Cachuma Project can store water and call it project water. That was the basis for the "live stream" agreement.

PL: How did that come about, wasn't the Gin Chow Decision enough?

Mr. P: No, because it only covered the Gibraltar Project. This was before the building of Cachuma, that Gin Chow was

handed down. Cachuma was more than 30 years later. On the appropriations for the Cachuma part of that was the conditions that there would be protection for down stream rights and that was when the "live stream" came into being

PL: With that live stream, do you have to see water above ground?

Mr. P: During the winter when they store water there has to be visual flowing water seen at the check points. And then at the lower one, under the present definition there has to be one cubic foot per second of water flowing at the 13th Street bridge in Lompoc.

PL: Where are those check points?

Mr. P: The first check point is at San Lucas Bridge, second, Refugio Bridge, third, Alisal, fourth, at Highway 101, and the fifth check point is in Lompoc, 13th Street Bridge.

PL: Who were some of the men who first formed the Santa Ynez River Conservation District?

Mr. P: I don't know, this was before my time. There have been a number of sets of directors over the years, at the time I became involved with the district the board consisted of William Cooper who has a walnut grove on Santa Rosa Rd., William Schyler of Lompoc, Richard Henning of Lompoc, Bill Laranjo, who lives half way to Lompoc from Buellton, and my cousin, Andy Petersen. Those five men were on the

board when I started with the Improvement District was formed and I started working.

PL: There is a board of directors?

Mr. P: Yes, there are five elected members and each represents a certain area of the district, they are elected by division and they have to be a voter and own land within that division. The Improvement District where I do most of my work is comprised of a board of trustees, four of them are elected from divisions and one is elected at large. Their work is only with the Improvement District facilities and they handle the problems of water distribution in our service district.

PL: How many people do you serve in your district?

Mr. P: Right now between 5 and 6,000 people, we do serve agriculture and domestic water, the difference is in the rate of cost. Irrigation water is commercial projects like growing crops and this kind of thing and if we have a water shortage we can turn those fellows off until the problem is solved. Domestic users are not nearly as easy to shut off for a period of time, that is troublesome.

PL: I understand there is right now a law suit by the different purveyors along the river against the city of Santa Barbara over raising Gibraltar Dam or reenforcing the dam, could you explain this?

Mr. P: Well, I'll try...Santa Barbara has put together a project and they are under the gun as far as the California Division of Dam Safety is concerned, who told them they had to reenforce and strengthen the dam because it is not earthquake safe. so the city decided that along with that they would do a little extra work and make it possible to raise the dam by 20 or 40 feet, to be able to recapture and store the same amount of water before the dam silted in. As a result of that, they wrote an environmental impact report. They forgot to include in there the work they were doing on the lifting of the height of the dam to recapture that storage. Some of the water purveyors took exception to that because the effect of their raising that dam would effect any enlargement of.Cachumas Dan so there are five or six purveyor districts who got together and said, "Hey, you did not address all the questions and problems that go with the EIR. "So now the city is going back and are trying to iron that out, and get it resolved. I'm not sure how it is going to come out entirely yet, but I would look for the city to probably rewrite the EIR and include those questions.

PL: What can they do about Gibraltar?

Mr. P: Well, they will have to strengthen the dam, to be able to meet the safety codes, if they increase the height of it and try to recapture that lost amount due to siltation, it could have an effect on the Cachuma Project and the water

that is available from that dam. As a result of that there has been a lot of effort to see if they could not work out a deal where Santa Barbara would pass the water through Gibraltar to Cachuma and then take it all from Cachuma and in that way there would be no effect on the Cachuma Project. Those talks are still going on so hopefully that will take place.

PL: So the reason the purveyors are concerned is because if they strengthen Gibraltar and raise the dam, it will keep more water in Gibraltar and Cachuma will hold less?

Mr. P: Yes, basically yes, if they try to take more out of Gibraltar that will have an effect on the yield of Cachuma and so we are concerned about that of course because we take part of our water from Cachuma and so do other entities along the river.

PL: Do you sit in on those meetings?

Mr. P: No, only the legal counsel do this and our counsel is Stanley Hatch.

PL: All the dams on the river have been a great blessing to the south coast, but has this been a detriment to the Santa Ynez Valley?

Mr. P: I would like to think that we have tried to protect the rights of the people along the river to the extent that they have not been damaged by the taking of water to the

south coast. I think that in the southern part of California you can't expect a river like the Santa Ynez to be left undeveloped. It had to been developed to store that water because it come down in such irregular fashioned. That you have to be able to put it away and keep it, because of times like now (with the drouth) so that you have water to carry you over.

PL: But as so many of the old timers have told me, this river was one of the very best fishing areas in California for steel-head and salmon.

Me. P: I don't know if there is any way to accommodate everyone. I know my Dad used to fish down there for steel-head and salmon and always enjoyed it but I was a little too young to participate in that. Probably that is fortunate as I would have remembered those days too. But I don't know, you have to decide whether it is more important to have fish or water for the people. I think we see some of these things going over board now on protecting the fish and forgetting the people and I don't know how all this is going to come out but the pendulum does swing and I see some activity now with the enlargement of Cachuma where the increase yield may all have to go in down stream releases to protect the fish and I just doubt the wisdom of that. I don't think the fish are going to pay part of the project.

PL: There aren't that many fish in the river these days, are there?

Mr. P: There aren't and that is the problem, but when you start to restore the fisheries in the Santa Ynez River, then you have a tremendous cost and the recreation does not pay it's way on the dam projects, and I don't know who will pay that cost. I don't think the people in the areas of Santa Barbara County that will be served by water out of that project are going to think very highly of having to pay for the reestablishment of a fishery on the river.

PL: Up at Gibraltar, I understand there is a little bird that is causing some concern on that project. This bird nests in the willows up there only about three months a year then goes back to Mexico, yet the environmentalists want protect the bird. So one has to weigh to good of bird and fish with good of people?

Mr. P: Thats right and I don't think that the people are getting a fair shake. I think that the Least Bells Vireo, that bird you are talking about, should not be allowed to govern whether or not there is activity in storing water and providing water for the people, someone has a priorty that isn't quite right.

PL: I'd like to talk a minute about the 1969 flood that occurred along the Santa Ynez River? I suppose you are still being reverberations on that?

Mr. P: Well, of course the 1969 flood was one of two big events on the river. There was enough water passed down the river to fill Cachuma at least twice so well over 400,00 acre feet went to the ocean in those few days. Those storms are typical of what you see in this country. One year will be very dry and the next will be wet and those storms occurred at the end of January and at the end of February. They were large storms and we got a lot of water, the district lost about a half million dollars worth of pipe line up in the river that had to be rebuilt and fortunately we got a project together with the Bureau of Reclamation to repair that. Under the disaster thing that was declared, we got by. I think we had to buy a new easement for one stretch of pipe line and it was about $5,000.00, so we came out very well on that. But we still hear references to that flood of '69 and you know I have a great deal of respect for the river after that experience. We have seem other storms that have been fairly goo like 1978. We had a drouth in '76 and '77, Cachuma Dam was down 28 feet and it came up in 1978 and about filled in 24 hours. So you see there was a tremendous amount of water, a topping off of those flood flows so that they tend to go into storage so that they tend go into storage and if the dam does spill, the spill will be less than would there never have been a dam.

PL: That year's flood was very destructive to a lot of

ranchers down river!

Mr. P: Yes it was, to the extent that they lost good top soil, there is now question about that, but that is the nature of this kind of river. It's sometimes wild and most of the time tame.

PL: Couldn't they have opened the flood gates gradually so that the rush of water wasn't so great?

Mr. P: Not really, because there is no flood storage in the Cachuma Project. When that dam is full the gates automatically come up and open and as the inflow increases they tend to increase, I looked at the charts showing the inflow and outflow on the lake and it was pretty obvious that the inflow comes up faster than the releases that took water out so it spread the peak of the flood over hours than it would have had there been no dam there. So it did cut down on the amount of peak flow but everything was so wet that the soil just eroded very easily anyway.

PL: What do you think about State Water?

Mr. P: There have been a lot of studies done in Santa Barbara County since about 1982 or 3 and looking at all the alternatives for additional water for the county, for North County,, Santa Maria down to Lompoc, but Lompoc could go either way but that seems to be (State Water) the most practical alternative for the North County.

for South County there is politically a great deal of resistance to bringing in State Water and I think South County is regard to the Santa Ynez River believes it is "their" river, which is unfortunate for us because it puts more pressure on us. They have the biggest puddle at their front door, the Pacific Ocean, and it is only a matter of dollars whether they can use that as a water supply is concerned. I don't think they have even looked at that, desalination. Desalination is more expensive than State Water or raising Cachuma. Desalination is a very expensive operation and as a result of that it takes a lot of electric power so it is not cheap once you buy that process. But the ability of the urban users to pay for water that is expensive, they could easily did that but you can't grow crops and pay for that kind of water, that won't work as it would be too expensive for the growers. Because of the lower volume primarily used by urbanites, and if you could blend that with some of the cheaper source, it would not be as prohibitive for them.

PL: It is interesting that you say that the South Coast cities feel the Santa Ynez River is "theirs."

Mr. P: Unfortunately that is the way they think. All through the southern part of the state, rivers have been used by big cities.

PL: What do you see for the future of your Improvement

District?

Mr. P: I see an escalation of problems on the river as far as water rights are concerned, as additional usages occur, additional exporting, and I think there are many interpretations that have to be clarified in the Gin Chow Decision, and there will be appropriations filled for an expanded Cachuma. There will be a lot of hearings and activity in the district trying to keep in place the "live stream" agreement and provide water to the people down stream and there are going to be challenges on the part of the South Coast Districts to get more water.

End of Side 1, Tape 1

Begin Side 2, Tape 1

PL: What do you mean about reevaluating the Gin Chow Decision?

Mr. P: There are apparently some interpretations of the city, for example, thinking that the Gin Chow gives about 14 to 15,000 feet of water a year and we take the position that they have the right to take 4,189 acre feet and thats it! They have never taken more than that and have no right to, the right they once had has expired and you know, down the road I can see because of these water supplies getting shorter and shorter that there is going to be more and more contention and it will require some court action to get these things sorted out. If they go ahead and raise the dam up there, our counsel tells me that one of the

things he said, that they are going to have to go back in a get a new appropriation because they don't have the right to take that extra water Whether or not that is going to happen or not I don't know. They may say,"Hey, thats our water," even though they have never taken it. So I think all that will to a head in the Cachuma Project. The fish interests on raising the dam are going to want to reestablish down stream fisheries and they are going to use a good share of that enlargement yield for that purpose. Whether or not that will occur, I can see that we are going to see pressure on that score. So I see a lot of tough fighting that I think will take place in the next ten to fifteen years. It will not be a short fight, it will be a very long, expensive fight.

PL: And in the meantime, things will go on as usual?

Mr. P: Well, we hope so and we hope we have enough water to serve our people. we have tried to ensure that we do that and you know, time will tell. I thing we are covered unless we have severe drouths, than we have had see in the last 30 years.

PL: You say that as of today, you are able to serve all your customers?

Mr. P: If we reach the point of full development on the existing land use plans for our area, we would be able to serve all the new construction without any trouble. Now we might say, another two years of drouth on the Cachuma Project

where there is only a mud puddle at the bottom, then we might have some serious problems. But those would be unusual problems. Generally drouths have not lasted more than two to three years, then we have a good year and the lake comes back. We are at a point where we have about 120,000 acre feet of storage at Cachuma which is a little over half full or half empty as you look at it. With that much water in storage, we have a couple of more years of time and water resource from the project.

PL: Even though the Santa Ynez Valley is growing very fast?

Mr. P: Well, generally here we see a conversion of, lets say, from large commercial irrigation to small farms and ranchettes or 5 to 10 acres, or even down to 1 acre. The water used on those smaller sites especially the one acre are even to serve. So it is not so much an increase in population but less water for large acreage. Water use has been very stable in our district for several years.

PL: What about the concept of water conservation?

Mr. P: I think everyone is practicing conservation but conservation is a short term thing. People will conserve water well if they know there is an end to it, but in 1977 there were places where they saw conservation of up to 25 % but I don't think you can count on that for a long term water supply. People get tired of rationing and going without. If there is no end to

conservation they slop back into using water as they want to use it. Goleta, for example, has gone to a great deal of conservations efforts and I think if you really analysised carefully their results over the last 12 years, their saving is much lower that they claim.

PL: What does the future hold you you, Tom?

Mr. P: I guess I am going to be working here for a few more years, then hopefully enjoy a good retirement. we have gotten our kids through school, our daughter just graduated from medical school, as you know, and is doing intern work at Harvard's Freedom Hospital, and will be there for three years. So with that she will be launched on her own, our other two children have gone from home and are on their own, so Carolyn and I enjoy the things we want to do.

PL: And you have liked you job?

Mr. P; Well, after all I would not have been there 28 years if I didn't. I have had a lot of opportunities to participate in community activities, Carolyn too, and we have enjoyed that. I served on the Ballard School Board, as my dad and Granddad did before me, served on the Historical Society Board when we bought the building the museum is in now. I have served on the Santa Ynez Valley Hospital Board and a term on the County Fair Board in Santa Maria, it has been very rewarding.

PL: Is there anything that comes to mind that you have been able to accomplish as manager of the district?

Mr. P: Thats hard to say, you know there have been a lot of things that have come along through the years that have been really rewarding to see, not that anybody else couldn't have done a better job, but it was part of the job. One of the things I have enjoyed is working with the Bureau of Reclamation on a conference every year and I have done this for a number of years. I was a member of a steering committee and in the process we have made some contracts to have things like loans for drilling wells for the district, that have helped us out during the last drouth, and that would not have been available had I not sat on the committee and in touch with those people.

PL: This is the United States Bureau of Reclamation, is it hard to work with the government?

Mr. P: It depends on the branch of government you are talking about. The Bureau has been always good to work with, and we had a good relationship. Some of the other departments, I am not so sure about.

PL: Thank you, Tom Petersen, for this time today, I know how busy you are at the district.